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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of eighteen members of the Human Rights Council

Letter dated 4 February 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to recall that Switzerland has decided to present its candidature for the elections to the Human Rights Council (for the term 2016-2018) to be held during the main part of the seventieth session of the General Assembly. I enclose herewith a copy of the voluntary pledges and commitments undertaken by Switzerland in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251.

Promoting universal respect for all human rights is a priority of Switzerland's foreign policy, as stipulated in its Constitution. That commitment is based on the conviction that the realization of these rights promotes both development and peace and security. Also, as the host State of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, and in a spirit of cooperation and dialogue, Switzerland is committed to continuing to support and strengthen the Human Rights Council. The Council must be able to fulfil the mandate entrusted to it as the main United Nations body for the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.

Switzerland has played an active role in the establishment of the Human Rights Council and its institutional strengthening. It has initiated or supported a series of trans-regional initiatives in areas as diverse as the abolition of the death penalty, transitional justice, accountability, the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests, human rights and the environment, human rights and the digital age, education and training in human rights, the safety of journalists, and the prevention and elimination of child marriage and early and forced marriages.

After an extensive preparatory procedure carried out on a participatory basis, Switzerland underwent its second universal periodic review in October 2012 and is

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now working in close collaboration with civil society to implement the resulting recommendations.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 114 (e) of the preliminary list.

(*Signed*) Paul **Seger**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex to the letter dated 4 February 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of Switzerland to the Human Rights Council for the term 2016-2018

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

Promoting universal respect for all human rights is a priority of Switzerland's foreign policy, as stipulated in its Constitution. That commitment is based on the conviction that the protection of these rights promotes development as well as peace and security. Accordingly, as the host State of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva, Switzerland is committed to continuing to support and strengthen the Human Rights Council, so that it can fulfil the mandate entrusted to it as the main United Nations body for the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. Switzerland also supports the work of OHCHR and the human rights treaty bodies.

Switzerland is presenting its candidature for a third term on the Human Rights Council, this time for the period 2016-2018. During its two previous terms (2006-2009 and 2010-2013), Switzerland undertook, in close cooperation with other States and civil society partners, to ensure that the Human Rights Council would become a strong and effective institution.

Switzerland has played an active role, both in terms of institutional strengthening and in the review process of the Human Rights Council; it has, moreover, been a key driver in the establishment of the Office of the President of the Human Rights Council. Finally, it has initiated or supported a series of trans-regional initiatives in areas as diverse as transitional justice, accountability, the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests, human rights and the environment, human rights and the digital age, education and training in human rights, and the safety of journalists, as well as on the issues of child marriage, early marriage and forced marriage. These initiatives have yielded concrete results, starting with the establishment of new special procedures (Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment), the adoption of new human rights instruments (United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training) and the establishment of the Geneva-based group of Friends of the International Criminal Court. During its years as a member of the Council, Switzerland worked to enable the Council to respond appropriately to human rights violations around the world.

After an extensive and participatory preparation procedure, Switzerland underwent its second universal periodic review in October 2012 and is now working, in close collaboration with civil society, to achieve rapid implementation of the resulting recommendations.

As part of its candidacy for a third term on the Human Rights Council, Switzerland proposes the following voluntary pledges and contributions:

1. To promote and protect human rights at the national level

To promote human rights at the national level, the Swiss Government commits to continue the efforts it has undertaken to fulfil its human rights obligations at both the federal and cantonal levels and to raise awareness among all social actors and bodies with regard to the need to protect, respect and implement those rights, a goal it is reaching by encouraging education and training in human rights, as well as by engaging in advocacy and dialogue. Moreover, it undertakes to cooperate fully with the human rights treaty bodies by submitting regular reports and following their recommendations, as well as with the special procedures mandate holders, to whom it has issued a standing invitation. It intends to fulfil those commitments through the following measures:

- Strengthening coordination among all leaders at the cantonal and federal levels. In this regard, it intends to develop a national ad hoc mechanism to facilitate the development of standard procedures for preparing periodic reports and monitoring the implementation of the recommendations accepted by Switzerland.
- Implementing in good faith the universal periodic review recommendations it has accepted and drafting the third report on the human rights situation in Switzerland in a manner that is transparent and participatory, thereby strengthening dialogue with Swiss civil society.
- Considering the establishment of a national human rights institution, in accordance with the Paris Principles, and assessing the contributions made since the launch of the Swiss Centre of Expertise in Human Rights pilot project.
- Promoting respect for human rights on the part of companies based in Switzerland. In this regard, it intends to elaborate and implement a national strategy based on the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- Intensifying its efforts, through public information campaigns, to raise the awareness of the general public and potential sex trade clients on the issue of trafficking in human beings, especially sexual trafficking.
- Reducing inequalities between men and women in the labour market. In this regard, it intends to adopt and implement an effective national strategy that includes programmes to alleviate discriminatory wage gaps and increase the number of women in leadership and decision-making positions.
- Continuing its efforts at the national, regional and local levels to combat racism, discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. In this regard, it intends to encourage inclusion of all segments of the population.
- Strengthening efforts to combat violence against women and children and domestic violence. For this reason, it intends to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.
- Continuing efforts on behalf of children and youth. In this regard, it intends to take measures to protect them from all forms of violence, promote their rights and foster their participation in decisions affecting them at all levels.

- Keeping under review the possibility of withdrawing the reservations made upon ratification of certain conventions and stepping up efforts to sign and ratify international human rights instruments to which it is not yet party, such as the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.

2. To promote and protect human rights at the international level

To promote human rights at the international level, the Government of Switzerland undertakes to support States that strive to meet their relevant obligations through various mechanisms, including bilateral and multilateral human rights dialogues, exchanges of experts and advisory services. It intends to fulfil those commitments through the following measures:

- Continuing its commitment to the universal abolition of the death penalty. In this regard, it intends to provide financial and logistical support to the secretariat of the Geneva-based International Commission against the Death Penalty and to raise the issue with the Human Rights Council and other competent United Nations bodies.

- Strengthening efforts to hold accountable the perpetrators of serious human rights violations. In this regard, it intends, in particular, to support the work of the International Criminal Court and the investigation mechanisms of the Council, as well as to continue supporting the work of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence.

- Contributing to the promotion and protection of human rights and strengthening the rule of law, democracy and good governance in partner countries of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

- Continuing its commitment to women's rights, in order to empower women and girls, both economically and politically, and achieve gender equality. In this regard, it intends to remain an active member of the relevant multilateral bodies (such as the Commission on the Status of Women of the United Nations and the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe) and support initiatives to end discrimination against women and girls, paying particular attention to efforts to eradicate violence against women and girls, female genital mutilation, and early and forced marriages.

- Contributing actively to procedures to shed light on the responsibility of the private sector and obligations of States and to identify means of redress available in cases of human rights violations by businesses. In this regard, it intends to resolutely promote the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

- Continuing to work towards universal recognition of the right to water and sanitation through the Council and other competent United Nations bodies. In this regard, it intends to support the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

- Continuing its efforts to combat all forms of discrimination, in particular when they target the most vulnerable, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered

and intersex persons. In this regard, it intends to support dissemination of the recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the rights of those individuals and actively pursue dialogue with States where they are violated.

- Maintaining its strong commitment to the prevention of torture. In this regard, it intends to support the establishment of national preventive mechanisms, promote the exchange and dissemination of good practices at the regional level and strengthen Geneva's role as a platform for action in that regard.

- Continuing its commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests by referring relevant situations of concern to the Council.

- Maintaining its commitment to the protection of human rights defenders. In this regard, it intends to implement the Swiss Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders which aim to standardize the practices of Swiss diplomatic missions abroad in order to ensure better protection for human rights defenders.

- Maintaining its financial support for non-governmental organizations contributing to the promotion and protection of human rights.

3. To strengthen the Human Rights Council

To promote the strengthening of the Human Rights Council, the Swiss Government undertakes to ensure that this institution can fulfil its mandate under the best possible conditions. It intends to meet this commitment through the following measures:

- Continuing to participate actively in the work of the Council in a spirit of cooperation and genuine dialogue with partners from all regions.

- Taking stock of the progress that the Human Rights Council has achieved by identifying the challenges ahead. In this regard, it intends to convene a high-level meeting in 2016 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Council.

- Continuing to provide support to the least developed countries that do not have permanent missions in Geneva. In this regard, it intends to provide rent-free premises and low-cost housing, in order to promote their full participation in the universal periodic review.

- Enhancing the participation of non-governmental organizations and national human rights institutions in the work of the Council. In this regard, it intends to work towards ensuring that transparent rules provide further clarity as to how they can be excluded from discussions.

- Continuing to develop training, reflection and know-how on global governance, including human rights. In this regard, it intends to promote the creation, in Geneva, of think tanks and multi-stakeholder platforms, and build the capacity of global governance actors present in Geneva.

- Strengthening efforts to achieve universal representation. In this regard, it intends to extend support to States that do not yet have permanent representation in Geneva.

4. To provide support to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

To reaffirm its support for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other relevant United Nations funds, programmes and agencies, the Government of Switzerland undertakes to continue its close collaboration and dialogue with these institutions. It intends to meet this commitment through the following measures:

- Intensifying efforts to strengthen the financial base of OHCHR by undertaking to ensure that the work of that body, carried out in compliance with a mandate from the Human Rights Council, is funded under the regular budget of the United Nations.
- Supporting the efforts of OHCHR to strengthen the capacity of States parties to comply with their obligations under international human rights treaties. In this regard, it intends to provide it with technical and financial support to carry out such activities.
- Continuing to support the human rights treaty body system. In this regard, it intends to work to maintain its independence and high level of expertise and to assist in improving its working methods, thereby enhancing its effectiveness.
- Promoting the integration of human rights in the post-2015 process. In this regard, it intends to foster a rights-based approach to development in the context of its support for United Nations operational activities and in its engagement in high-level political forums as well as ad hoc governing bodies of the funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations.